



STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
6th FLOOR, ANDREW JOHNSON TOWER
710 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0375

PHIL BREDESEN
GOVERNOR

LANA C. SEIVERS, Ed.D.
COMMISSIONER

TO: Directors of Schools; Attendance Supervisors; and
Supervisors of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Data

FROM: Timothy K. Webb, Assistant Commissioner
Resources and Support Services

DATE: December 4, 2006

SUBJECT: NCLB Graduation Rate Calculation and Dropout Data
Audit of Record Keeping

The Department of Education is committed to ensuring not only that school and district graduation rates are of the highest quality, but that the state graduation rate is an accurate indicator of educational attainment. Several national reports suggest that Tennessee's graduation rate is lower than the rate that the Department calculates using data reported by school districts. To ensure the credibility of Tennessee's graduation rate, it is essential that schools and school districts properly code all student withdrawals, including maintaining documentation to support the use of transfer codes and limiting the use of "exclusion" codes.

In an effort to clarify (1) the NCLB graduation rate calculation, (2) graduation rate appeals, (3) proper record keeping, (4) dropout definition, and (5) withdrawal codes, the following explanations are provided and should be read carefully and distributed to all personnel who may be involved in any area of record keeping or reporting referenced below.

1. Graduation Rate Calculation:

In the calculation of the graduation rate for NCLB, all completers recorded on the high school roster of graduates and all cohort dropout counts are included in the denominator of the formula. Completers are students receiving a regular diploma, special education diploma, certificate of attendance, or GED. Only regular, on-time graduates are included in the numerator. Non-completers included on the roster (seniors retained and enrolled for the following year) are not included in the graduation rate calculation.

Students meeting the definition of a dropout (found below) must be reported in the aggregate dropout counts reported by the school system to the TDOE. Because dropout data is used for multiple reporting purposes, and not just the calculation of the NCLB graduation rate, each year a student drops out must be reported. Personnel responsible for reporting the aggregate dropout counts to the TDOE must retain a hardcopy of the list of students supporting the reported counts.

2. Graduation Rate Appeals:

Beginning with the release of the 2005-06 Graduation Rate Calculations, school systems will be required to review all data included in the calculation to ensure accuracy. The appeal time frame for the 2005-2006 graduation rate is November 15, 2006 – January 12, 2007. *This will be*

the only opportunity for appeal of the graduation rate, which will be used for 2007 AYP purposes.

Within the designated time frame, an appeal may be submitted to request an adjustment to the data used in the graduation rate calculation. Typical appeals request changes when a student is not properly recorded on the roster of graduates or when the same student is included more than once in the denominator of any graduation rate calculation.

When requesting students be removed from the dropout counts, the original list of students included in the dropout counts reported must be provided. All documentation from a student's permanent record related to enrollment, withdrawal, graduation, etc. must be provided to support the removal of the student from the counts. Failure to submit the lists of students supporting the original counts and sufficient documentation showing individual student history will result in denial of the request.

As always, appeals will be final as originally submitted, and the school system is expected to have proper understanding of the guidelines surrounding the reporting of completers, withdrawal of students, and record keeping.

3. Proper Record Keeping:

When a student is withdrawn from school, care must be taken to ensure that the proper withdrawal code is used and can be supported with sufficient documentation regarding the reason for withdrawal. The student's permanent record *must* contain all documentation supporting the withdrawal code used.

As outlined in the attendance manual, the following documentation must be on file at the local school system, central office or the individual school as indicated:

- For withdrawals, sufficient documentation of a student's reason for withdrawal. This may include documentation provided by relatives and community contacts, court documents, record requests, etc. This documentation should be kept in the student's permanent record.
- A permanent record containing all pertinent information with regard to a student's withdrawal from school, including the signature of the parent or guardian requesting withdrawal, and to the extent possible, the student's future destination.

4. Dropout Definition:

The following definition found in the "Student Membership and Attendance Accountability Procedures Manual" should be applied when determining if a student is a dropout.

1. A dropout is an individual who:
 - a. was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year;
 - b. was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year;
 - c. has not graduated from high school or completed a state-approved educational program; and

- d. **does not** meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:
 - transfer to another public school system, private school, or specifically approved state education program
 - *temporary* absence due to suspension or excused illness
 - death.
2. For purposes of applying the dropout definition, the following additional definitions also apply:
 - a. For reporting purposes, the school year is defined as the period of time between July 1 and June 30 of the following year.
 - b. An individual has graduated from high school or completed an approved education program upon receipt of formal recognition from school authorities.
 - c. A state-approved program may include Special Education Programs, Home-based Instruction, GED Plus 2/Exit Option Program, Alternative Schools or some other certification differing from the regular diploma. (Special Education Diploma).

The GED Plus 2/Exit Option Program is the only GED preparation program in which a student may participate without first being a dropout. A student transferring into an adult high school program is still a dropout unless a diploma is earned within 4 years and a summer school. This is consistent with federal NCLB definitions.

- d. Students who pass the GED within the same year they drop out can be re-entered and considered completers. These students are coded as GED completers but are only included in the denominator of the graduation rate calculation. (Rev. 2006-07 SY)

5. Withdrawal Codes:

The following are valid withdrawal codes as outlined in the "Student Membership and Attendance Accountability Procedures Manual." Included are examples of valid situations that apply to certain withdrawal codes, as well as recently identified common misuse of codes.

00 – Dropout, under 18

01 – Dropout, 18 and over

These codes should be used when applicable based on the dropout definition found above and in the attendance manual. An age waiver signed by DCS does not exempt a student from being counted as a dropout.

If a student has not yet earned a completion document, his or her education must continue after withdrawing from a school. *If a student's withdrawal documentation does not support the student's continued education elsewhere, the student is a dropout.* All dropouts must be coded with the above '00' or '01' codes.

If a student meets the definition of a dropout, do not record the student's withdrawal with any of the following codes.

02 – Withdrawn to state institution (i.e. TPS, DHS, etc.) – (The reference to TPS and DHS are not current and will be updated in the attendance manual.)

This code only applies when a student is withdrawn from school and placed in a state institution that provides educational services such as a DCS run Youth Development Center or group home containing an in-house school. Do not use this withdrawal code when a student in DCS custody drops out of school. Additionally, an age waiver signed by DCS does not exempt a student from being counted as a dropout.

03 – Transferred to other Tennessee school system

04 – Transferred to other school in same system

05 – Transferred out of state

06 – Transferred to non-public school in Tennessee

If a student was coded as a '00' or '01' and it is later determined that the student indeed transferred and did not drop out, the dropout code should be changed to one of the above appropriate codes. A dropout code may only be changed if the student transfers within the same school year (July 1 through June 30.) There is currently no withdrawal code to accommodate a student who drops out and then returns to the same school within the same school year. For this reason, if the student returns to the same school, the '00' or '01' code remains. The business rules of the EIS dropout report ensure that a student is not counted as a dropout if there is a subsequent enrollment in the same school following the last dropout event.

07 – Doctor certified withdrawal

To be used when, in the opinion of a physician licensed by the State Board of Medical Examiners, a student must be *temporarily* withdrawn from school. (A psychologist is not a licensed physician.) A copy of the document, signed by the licensed physician, must be retained in the student's file.

08 – Deceased

09 – Transferred to mental or drug rehabilitation institution.

A copy of the supporting documentation, signed by the licensed physician, must be retained in the student's file.

10 – Withdrawn to a home school (Formal intent to register must be on file)

11 – Court Order (Copy of court order or judge decision must be on file)

A copy of the court order or judge's decision that allows the student to be withdrawn from school must be retained in the student's file. If a student is ordered by the court to enroll in a GED program, the following definition applies, and the use of this code is not appropriate.

The GED Plus 2/Exit Option Program is the only GED preparation program in which a student may participate without first being a dropout. A student transferring into an adult high school program is still a dropout unless a diploma is earned within 4 years and a summer school. This is consistent with federal NCLB definitions.

Students who pass the GED within the same year they drop out can be re-entered and considered completers. These students are coded as GED completers but are only included in the denominator of the graduation rate calculation. (Rev. 2006-07 SY)

12 – Graduation prior to spring graduation or by August 15th of the senior summer. (regular diploma or GED diploma) Note: Copy of GED diploma must be on file. Students coded as W-12 must report a completion document type. **NOTE:** GED 2/Exit Option are not considered dropouts; however, they only count in the denominator of the graduation rate calculation. (Rev.2006-07 SY)

13 – Permanent dismissal from a Pre-K program. The program provider must provide to the State a written request and justification for permanent dismissal of any child from the Pre-K Program. No child is to be permanently dismissed without consultation between and agreement of the grantee and the Tennessee Department of Education. (Rev. 2006-07 SY)

14 – Withdrawn to enroll in another school within the district under the provisions for public school choice in accordance with Title 1, part A, Section 1116. (Rev. 2006-07 SY)

Again, when a student is withdrawn from school, care must be taken to ensure that the proper withdrawal code is used and can be supported with sufficient documentation regarding the reason for withdrawal. The student's permanent records *must* contain all documentation supporting the withdrawal code used. *The use of all withdrawal codes **is subject to audit.***

Remember, beginning with the release of the 2005-06 Graduation Rate Calculations, school systems will be required to review all data included in the calculation to ensure accuracy. This announced appeal window will be the only opportunity for appeal of the graduation rate.

There will be no opportunity for the future appeal of the graduation rate once the announced appeal time frame has passed. All post-appeal graduation rate calculations will be final and used in the determination of AYP.

Thank you for all you do to help teachers teach and children learn and for your continued efforts to ensure accurate record keeping of the students in your school system.